

A Course in Language Teaching

Trainee Book

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Module 1: Presentations and explanations

Unit One: Effective presentation

Question If you have learned a foreign language in a course, can you recall a particular teacher presentation or explanation that facilitated your grasp of some aspect of this language? How did it help?

Group task **Peer-teaching**

One participant chooses a topic or item of information (not necessarily anything to do with language teaching) on which they are well informed and in which they are interested, but which others are likely to be relatively ignorant about. They prepare a presentation of not more than five minutes, and then give it.

As many participants as possible give such presentations.

For each presentation, pick out and discuss what was effective about it.

Unit Two: Examples of presentation procedures

Task **Criticizing presentations**

For each of the descriptions in Box 1.1, consider and/or discuss:

1. What was the aim of the presentation?
2. How successful do you think this presentation was, or would be, in getting students to attend to, perceive, understand and remember the target material?
3. How appropriate and effective would a similar procedure be for you, in your teaching situation (or in a teaching situation you are familiar with)?

BOX 1.1: DIFFERENT PRESENTATIONS

Presentation 1: Reading words

. . . But if the vocabulary of a child is still inaccessible, one can always begin him on the general Key Vocabulary, common to any child in any race, a set of words bound up with security that experiments, and later on their creative writing, show to be organically associated with the inner world: 'Mummy', 'Daddy', 'kiss', 'frightened', 'ghost'.

'Mohi, . . . what word do you want?'

'Jet!'

I smile and write it on a strong little card and give it to him.

'What is it again?'

'Jet!'

'You can bring it back in the morning. What do you want, Gay?'

Gay is the classic overdisciplined, bullied victim of the respectable mother.

'House,' she whispers. So I write that, too, and give it into her eager hand.

(from Sylvia Ashton-Warner *Teacher*, Virago, 1980, pp. 35–6)

Presentation 2: Learning a dialogue

The main objective at the beginning is to achieve a good working knowledge of the dialogue in the textbook, so that it can be altered or elaborated afterwards . . .

1. Read out the dialogue, utterance by utterance, and ask the students to repeat it in different formations, acting out the roles in the following ways:
 - a) together in chorus;
 - b) half of the class take one role and the other half take the other role;
 - c) one student to another student;
 - d) one student to the rest of the class . . .

(from Zoltan Dörnyei, 'Exploiting textbook dialogues dynamically', *Practical English Teaching* 1986, 6, 4, 15–16)

Presentation 3: Accusations

It can happen to anyone who commutes – a traffic jam, a last minute phone call, a car that won't start – and you realise you are going to be late for a lesson . . . However, attack being the best form of defence, I recently found a way to turn my lateness to good account. A full ten minutes after the start of the lesson, I strode into the classroom and wrote on the board in huge letters

YOU'RE LATE!

Then I invited the students to yell at me with all the venom they could muster and we all laughed. So I wrote:

You're late **again!**

and:

You're **always** late!

So we practised these forms. They seemed to get a real kick out of putting the stress in the right place . . . When we had savoured the pleasure of righteous indignation, I proposed that everyone should write down the accusations most commonly levelled at him (or her). A rich and varied selection poured out such as:

You **always** eat my sweets!

You've lost the keys!

You haven't lost the keys **again**!

(from Alison Coullavin, 'Excuses, excuses', *Practical English Teaching*, 1983, 4, 2, 31)

Presentation 4: Dramatic soliloquy

. . . I shall never forget Miss Nancy McCall, and the day she whipped a ruler off my desk, and pointing it towards her ample bosom, declaimed, 'Is this a dagger which I see before me?' And there we sat, eyes a goggle, hearts a-thumping, in electrified silence.

(a letter from Anna Sotto in *The English Teachers' Journal* (Israel) 1986, 33)

Unit Three: Explanations and instructions

Task Giving instructions

Stage 1: Experience

If you are currently teaching, notice carefully how you yourself give instructions for a group- or pair-work activity in class, and note down immediately afterwards what you did, while the event is still fresh in your memory. Better, but not always feasible: ask other participants to observe you and take notes.

Alternatively, within a group: each participant chooses an activity and prepares instructions on how to do it. The activity may be: a game which you know how to play but others do not; a process (how to prepare a certain dish, how to mend or build something); or a classroom procedure. Two or three volunteer participants then actually give the instructions, and (if practical) the group goes on to start performing the activity.

Stage 2: Discussion

Can you think of ways in which the instructions in Stage 1 could have been made more effective?

Module 2: Practice activities

Unit One: The function of practice

BOX 2.1: SKILL LEARNING

VERBALIZATION →	AUTOMATIZATION →	AUTONOMY
Teacher describes and demonstrates the skilled behaviour to be learned; learners perceive and understand.	Teacher suggests exercises; learners practise skill in order to acquire facility, automatize; teacher monitors.	Learners continue to use skill on their own, becoming more proficient and creative.

Question Can you think of a skill – other than swimming or language – that you successfully learned through being taught it in some kind of course? And can you identify the stages defined in Box 2.1 in the process of that learning as you recall it?

Question Practice is the activity through which language skills and knowledge are consolidated and thoroughly mastered. As such, it is arguably the most important of all the stages of learning; hence the most important classroom activity of the teacher is to initiate and manage activities that provide students with opportunities for effective practice. Do you agree with this statement (which expresses my own belief), or would you prefer to qualify it?

Unit Two: Characteristics of a good practice activity

Task **Defining effective language practice activities**

Stage 1: Selecting samples

Think of one or more examples of language practice of any kind which you have experienced either as teacher or as learner, and which you consider

were effective in helping the learners to remember, 'automatize', or increase their ease of use. Write down brief descriptions of them.

Stage 2: Analysis

Consider: what were the factors, or characteristics, that in your opinion made these activities effective? Note down, either on your own or in collaboration with other participants, at least two such characteristics – more if you can.

Stage 3: Discussion

Share and compare ideas with those of your trainer and other participants, and discuss.

Unit Three: Practice techniques

Task **Assessing practice activities**

For each scenario in Box 2.2, discuss:

1. What is the apparent goal of the practice activity?
2. How far is this goal achieved?
3. What are the factors that make it effective or ineffective?
4. If you could redesign the material or offer advice to the teacher, what would you suggest?

BOX 2.2: PRACTICE SCENARIOS

Scenario 1: Spelling

This is based on the game 'Hangman'. The teacher writes seven dashes on the board, and invites the students to guess what letters they represent. They start guessing letters:

Student 1: E.

Teacher: No. (writes E on the board, and a base-line indicating the foot of a gallows)

Student 2: A.

Teacher: Right. (fills in A on the second-to-last dash)

Student 3: S.

Teacher: No. (writes up S, draws in a vertical line in the gallows-drawing)

. . . And so on. After a minute or so of guessing, the class arrives at the word 'JOURNAL', which is written up in full on the board. It is then erased, and the teacher, or a student, thinks of another word, marks up the corresponding number of dashes, and the guessing process is repeated.

Scenario 2: Listening comprehension

The class listen to the following recorded text:

Ozone is a gas composed of molecules possessing three oxygen atoms each (as distinct from oxygen, which has two atoms per molecule). It exists in large quantities in one of the upper layers of the atmosphere, known as the stratosphere, between 20 and 50 kilometres above the surface of the earth.

The ozone layer filters out a large proportion of the sun's ultra-violet rays and thus protects us from the harmful effects of excessive exposure to such radiation.

The teacher then tells the students to open their books and answer the multiple-choice questions on a certain page. The multiple-choice questions are:

1. The passage is discussing the topic of
a) radiation. b) oxygen. c) ozone. d) molecules.
2. Ozone molecules are different from oxygen molecules in that they
a) have three atoms of oxygen.
b) exist in large quantities.
c) may have one or two atoms.
d) have one atom of oxygen.
3. The stratosphere is
a) above the atmosphere.
b) below the atmosphere.
c) more than 20 kilometres above the surface of the earth.
d) more than 50 kilometres above the surface of the earth.
4. The ozone layer
a) prevents some harmful radiation from reaching the earth.
b) stops all ultra-violet rays from reaching the earth.
c) protects us from the light of the sun.
d) involves excessive exposure to ultra-violet rays.

When the students have finished, the teacher asks volunteers for their answers, accepting or correcting as appropriate.

Scenario 3: Grammar exercise

The teacher writes on the board a sentence that describes a present situation:

Tom is looking in all his pockets, but he cannot find his keys. (lose)

She asks the students to suggest a sentence in the present perfect that describes what has happened to produce this situation, using the verb in brackets at the end. A student volunteers:

Tom has lost his keys.

The teacher approves this answer and writes up a second, similar sentence:

The Browns live in that house in the corner, but they are not there at the moment. (go away)

Another student volunteers the answer; this time it is wrong, and the teacher asks someone else, who produces a correct answer.

The teacher continues the same process with another four similar sentences.

Scenario 4: Vocabulary

Teacher: Who knows the meaning of the word *disappointment*? (Puzzled looks; a student hesitantly puts up his hand) Yes?

Student 1: Write a point?

Teacher: No . . . anyone else? (silence) Come on, think everybody, try again!

Student 2: Lose a point?

Teacher: No, it has nothing to do with points. Try again. It has something to do with feelings.

(After another few guesses, the last of which, after broad hints from the teacher, comes fairly near, the teacher finally gives the correct definition.)

Unit Four: Sequence and progression in practice

Task **Thinking about the sequencing of practice activities**

Stage 1: Ordering

Rearrange the activities in Box 2.3 in the order in which you would do them in a lesson or series of lessons.

Stage 2: Improving

Suggest any alterations or additions you might make to any of the activities in the list to improve their effectiveness. You may, of course, decide that there is one (or more) that you would not use at all.

Next, note any aspects of the language topic that you think are inadequately covered or not covered at all during the practice series. Create or select from textbooks some further activities which would cover the inadequacies you have noted and/or enhance learning of the target language in any way. Decide at what stage you would insert them.

BOX 2.3: SEQUENCING PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

The teacher has written on the board a selection of random numbers, in figures. He or she points to a number; the students call out its name.

Activity 2

The teacher has prepared a duplicated list of telephone numbers – the list has at least as many numbers as there are students in the class. On each paper a different number has been marked with a cross; this indicates to the student who gets the paper which is 'his/her' number.

A student 'dials' a number by calling it out, and the student whose number has been 'dialled' answers, repeats the number and identifies him- or herself. Other students can then fill in the name opposite the appropriate number on their lists. The identified student then 'dials' someone else, and so on.

Activity 3

Pairs of students are allotted numbers from one to twenty, so that any one number is shared by two students. They then mix, and sit in a circle. One student in the centre of the circle calls out a number, and the two students who own that number try to change places. As soon as one of them gets up, the student in the centre tries to sit in the vacated place before it can be filled. If successful, he or she takes over the number of the displaced player who then becomes the caller.

Activity 4

The learners write down, as figures, a series of random numbers dictated by the teacher. The answers are then checked.

Module 3: Tests

Unit One: What are tests for?

Inquiry **Reasons for testing**

Stage 1: Inquiry

Think about and write down the main reasons why you (would) test in the language classroom. Ask one or two experienced teachers what their main reasons are; and then ask some learners if they think being tested is helpful or important, and if so why. Note down the answers.

Stage 2: Critical reflection

BOX 3.1: REASONS FOR TESTING

Tests may be used as a means to:

1. give the teacher information about where the students are at the moment, to help decide what to teach next;
2. give the students information about what they know, so that they also have an awareness of what they need to learn or review;
3. assess for some purpose external to current teaching (a final grade for the course, selection);
4. motivate students to learn or review specific material;
5. get a noisy class to keep quiet and concentrate;
6. provide a clear indication that the class has reached a 'station' in learning, such as the end of a unit, thus contributing to a sense of structure in the course as a whole;
7. get students to make an effort (in doing the test itself), which is likely to lead to better results and a feeling of satisfaction;
8. give students tasks which themselves may actually provide useful review or practice, as well as testing;
9. provide students with a sense of achievement and progress in their learning.

Look at the list given in Box 3.1. These are the main reasons why I test in the classroom – not necessarily in order of importance. Consider, or discuss, the following questions about them.

1. How do the ideas in Box 3.1 compare with the results of your own inquiry and/or your own ideas?
2. Are there any ideas suggested by your respondents or yourself that are not mentioned here?
3. Are there any ideas here that you did not find or think of before?
4. Would you reject any of them as not significant, or irrelevant to your situation?

Stage 3: Reservations

As a by-product of your investigation and thinking up to now, you have probably come across some convincing reasons for *not* testing: the tension and negative feelings tests cause learners, for example, or the fact that they are very time-consuming. Note down all such reasons you can think of before moving on to the summary suggested in the next stage.

Stage 4: Summary

Which of your list of reasons for testing are, or would be, the most important for you personally? And how far are these offset by the disadvantages of testing you have just listed?

Unit Two: Basic concepts; the test experience

Experiment **Taking a test**

Stage 1: Preparation

Prepare for the test by learning (through your own reading, or through input from your trainer) the material you will be tested on. This consists of the following.

1. The theoretical concepts: validity, reliability, backwash (or washback).
2. The distinction between the following pairs of concepts:
 - achievement v. proficiency tests
 - diagnostic v. prognostic tests
 - discrete-point v. integrative tests
 - subjective v. objective tests.
3. The form of the following types of test items:
 - multiple-choice (including the concepts of ‘stem’, ‘options’, ‘distractors’)
 - cloze.

Stage 2: Doing the test

When you are ready, try doing the test in Box 3.2. You have twenty minutes. Your results will be expressed as a percentage; each of Questions 1–10 is worth ten marks. Question 11 is optional.

Stage 3: Checking

Your trainer will tell you the answers. Check, and give yourself a mark out of 100.

BOX 3.2: TEST ON TESTING

1. What is a 'valid' test?
2. What is a 'reliable' test?
3. What is 'backwash'?
4. What is the difference between an 'achievement' and a 'proficiency' test?
5. What is the difference between a 'diagnostic' and a 'prognostic' test?
6. Can you give an example of a 'discrete-point' test?
7. Can you give an example of an 'integrative' test?
8. Are Questions 1–7 above examples of 'objective' or 'subjective' test items? Why?
9. Give examples of:
 - a) a multiple-choice item
 - b) an extract from a cloze test.
10. Within the multiple-choice item you have given, can you identify:
 - a) the stem?
 - b) the options?
 - c) the distractors?
11. (Optional) How have you felt about doing this test?

Stage 4: Reflection and discussion

Reflecting on the test experience you have just had, and perhaps on other test experiences, discuss the following questions.

1. (If you did optional Question 11, look at your answer.) How did you feel about being tested? You may have felt: irritated, unpleasantly stressed, acceptably or even pleasantly tense, indifferent. Any other reactions or comments?
2. Did the fact that you knew you were going to be tested make any difference to how well you learned the material in advance?
3. Would you have preferred not to sum up your overall result (so much out of 100)? Or do you feel it important to get some kind of (numerical?) assessment after a test?
4. Would you have preferred someone else to check your answers?

Stage 5: Implications for teaching

You have just experienced a test from the point of view of a testee, and discussed that experience. Returning now to the role of teacher, go through your answers to each of the questions above and think about how they might affect the way you would, or should, test in the classroom.

Unit Three: Types of test elicitation techniques

Task **Critical study of elicitation techniques**

Try discussing the following questions with regard to the set of elicitation techniques shown in Box 3.3.

1. What will the elicitation technique tell me about the testee's knowledge? In other words, for what type of knowledge might it be a valid test?
2. How easy is it to compose?
3. How easy is it to administer?
4. How easy is it to mark?

BOX 3.3: ELICITATION TECHNIQUES

- 1. Questions and answers.** Simple questions, very often following reading, or as part of an interview; may require short or long answers:

What is the (family) relationship between David Copperfield and Mr Murdstone?

- 2. True/false.** A statement is given which is to be marked true or false. This may also be given as a question, in which case the answer is *yes* or *no*.

Addis Ababa is the capital of Egypt.
Is Addis Ababa the capital of Egypt?

- 3. Multiple choice.** The question consists of a stem and a number of options (usually four), from which the testee has to select the right one.

A person who writes books is called

- a) a booker. b) an editor. c) an author. d) a publisher.

- 4. Gap-filling and completion.** The testee has to complete a sentence by filling a gap or adding something. A gap may or may not be signalled by a blank or dash; the word to be inserted may or may not be given or hinted at.

They (go) to Australia in 1980.

Or

They _____ to Australia in 1980. (go)

Or

A _____ is someone who writes books.

Or

I've seen that film. (never)

5. Matching. The testee is faced with two groups of words, phrases or sentences; each item in the first group has to be linked to a different item in the second.

large	small
unhappy	many
a lot	big
little	sad

6. Dictation. The tester dictates a passage or set of words; the testee writes them down.

7. Cloze. Words are omitted from a passage at regular intervals (for example, every seventh word). Usually the first two or three lines are given with no gaps.

The family are all fine, though Leo had a bad bout of flu last week. He spent most of it lying on the sofa watching _____ when he wasn't sleeping!

His exams _____ in two weeks, so he is _____ about missing school, but has managed to _____ quite a lot in spite of _____ feeling ill.

8. Transformation. A sentence is given; the testee has to change it according to some given instruction.

Put into the past tense:

I go to school by bus.

9. Rewriting. A sentence is given; the testee rewrites it, incorporating a given change of expression, but preserving the basic meaning.

He came to the meeting in spite of his illness.

Although . . .

10. Translation. The testee is asked to translate expressions, sentences or entire passages to or from the target language.

11. Essay. The testee is given a topic, such as 'Childhood memories', and asked to write an essay of a specific length.

12. Monologue. The testee is given a topic or question and asked to speak about it for a minute or two.

Unit Four: Designing a test

Task **Designing a test**

Stage 1: Preparation

Prepare your test. It is a good idea to list in writing all the material that you want your test to cover: you can then refer back to the list during and after the test-writing to see if you have included all you intended.

You may find it helpful at this stage to refer to the guidelines listed in Box 3.4.

BOX 3.4: GUIDELINES FOR TEST PREPARATION

Validity. Check that your items really do test what they are meant to!

Clarity. Make sure the instructions for each item are clear. They should usually include a sample item and solution.

'Do-ability'. The test should be quite do-able: not too difficult, with no trick questions. Ask other participants to read through it and answer the questions before finalizing.

Marking. Decide exactly how you will assess each section of the test, and how much weighting (percentage of the total grade) you will give it. Make the marking system as simple as you can, and inform the testees what it is: write in the number of points allotted after the instructions for each question.

Interest. Try to go for interesting content and tasks, in order to make the test more motivating for the learners.

Heterogeneity. The test should be such that lower-level students can feel that they are able to do a substantial part of the test, while the higher-level ones have a chance to show what they know. So include both easy and difficult items, and make one or more of the difficult ones optional. (See Module 21: *Large heterogeneous classes* for more discussion of materials for heterogeneous classes.)

Stage 2: Performance

If possible, administer your test to a class of learners; if not, ask other participants to try doing it themselves.

Stage 3: Feedback

Look at how your test was done, and ask the testees how they felt about it. You might find it helpful to base your questions on the criteria in the guidelines in Box 3.4.

Unit Five: Test administration

Task **Thinking about test administration**

Let us assume that you are going to administer and mark a formal written test (whether or not you have written it yourself) in the course of your teaching programme. How will you prepare for, present and give feedback on it? Have in mind a teaching situation you are familiar with – your own class, if you are teaching, or the kind of class you expect to be teaching in due course – and a particular kind of test (preferably a specific one you have administered or taken yourself).

You may find it convenient to use the questions in Box 3.5 as a basis for thinking or discussion.

BOX 3.5: QUESTIONS ON TEST ADMINISTRATION

Before the test

- How far in advance do you announce the test?
- How much do you tell the class about what is going to be in it, and about the criteria for marking?
- How much information do you need to give them about the time, place, any limitations or rules?
- Do you give them any ‘tips’ about how best to cope with the test format?
- Do you expect them to prepare at home, or do you give them some class time for preparation?

Giving the test

- How important is it for you yourself to administer the test?
- Assuming that you do, what do you say before giving out the test papers?
- Do you add anything when the papers have been distributed but students have not yet started work?
- During the test, are you absolutely passive or are you interacting with the students in any way?

After the test

- How long does it take you to mark and return the papers?
- Do you then go through them in class?
- Do you demand any follow-up work on the part of the students?